

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 22 SEPTEMBER 2021

THE CONTINUUM OF EARLY HELP IN WORCESTERSHIRE

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families, the Director of Education and Early Help, Worcestershire Children First (WCF), the Assistant Director of Family Front Door and Partnerships, (WCF) and the Assistant Director for Communities have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on developments relating to the continuum of Early Help services in Worcestershire.

Background

2. It is the duty of all agencies to identify problems and prevent them from escalating where possible. Early Help describes a way of working that identifies problems early; is holistic in understanding how children may be affected and describes some specific services that help to prevent problems getting worse. This report updates Scrutiny on the development of provision, collaboration, and oversight of Early Help in Worcestershire, demonstrating the current and maturing approach to early help and services for children and families in the county.

3. Early help means providing help and support to a child, young person, or their family as soon as it is identified they need additional help and support and is detailed as multi-agency duties within 'Working Together 2018'. This could be at any point in a child or young person's life for example in pregnancy right the way through to their eighteenth birthday. This can be help and support on more than one occasion as we know children's needs change as they grow and develop, there is challenges in their communities and their family circumstances and situations can change too.

4. In Worcestershire it is known that through partnership work families can be helped to access the right help and support at the right time, and at the earliest opportunity. Children and young people can be supported to meet their full potential and try to stop the challenges or difficulties that they are facing from escalating for them and their family.

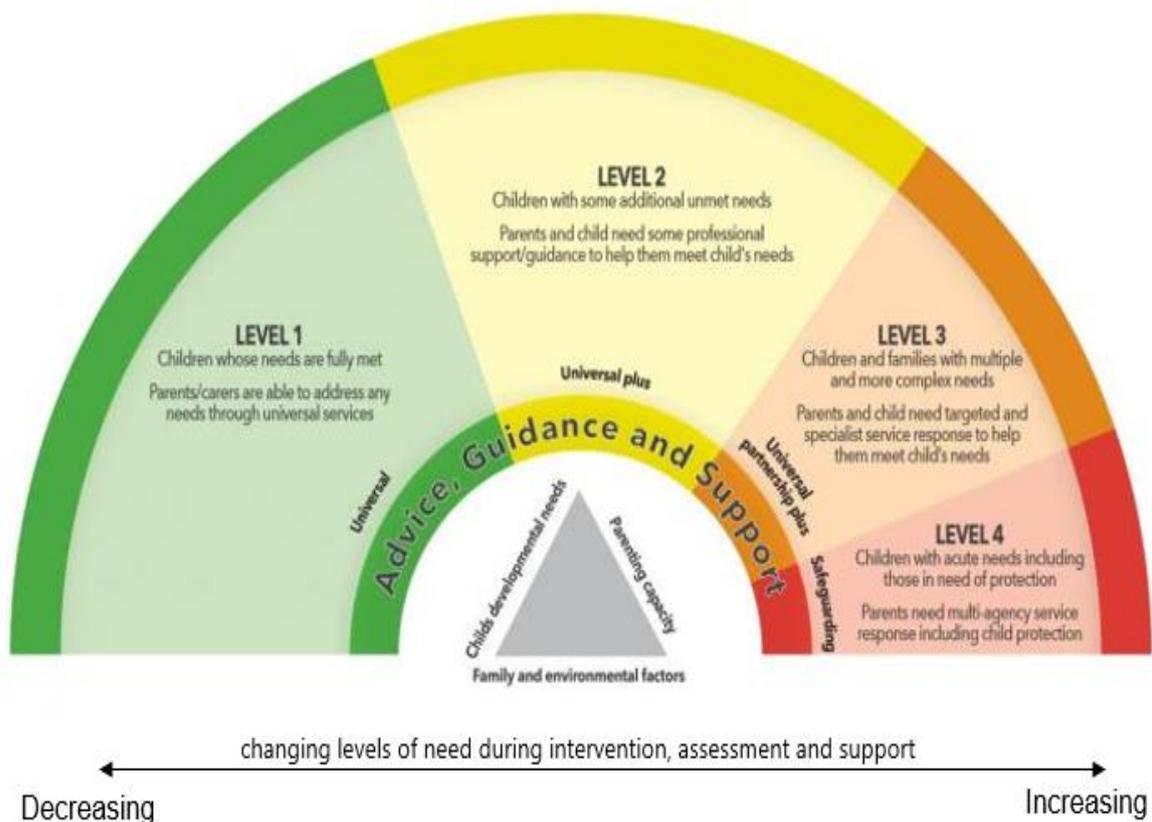
5. A new Worcestershire early help booklet has recently been launched and this is now live on the Early Help website as well as being distributed via partners to share with families. (The leaflet can be found in Appendix 1)

The Early Help Continuum of Need

6. The provision of Early Help services is a continuum which reflects the levels of need a family may have at the initial point of contact and for the duration of the time they require intervention services. This spans from:

- Level 1 - where children and young people have their needs met through ordinary access to universal services (by themselves or their parents/carers).
- Level 2 – where some additional professional support is required to meet unmet need
- Level 3 – where more intense help and support is required to meet multiple or more complex need, often requiring a coordinated multi-agency response and / or specialist services.
- Level 4 – where there is a need to safeguard vulnerable children / young people through involvement with social care to meet acute needs and provide protection.

7. The graphic below demonstrates these levels, thresholds, and remit of services which this report will further detail:



Early Help Strategic Partnership

8. The Early Help Partnership (EHP) has been established to ensure a whole systems approach to prevention, early intervention, and early help. The partnership is a sub-group of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) which in turn is a sub-group of the Health & Wellbeing Board (HWB). Governance arrangements are currently under review in all three groups to take into account the development of the Integrated Care System (ICS) and to ensure coordination and oversight across the system. Attending agencies (subject to review) include:

- Worcestershire Children First

- Worcestershire County Council
- Educational Establishments
- Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
- Worcestershire Health & Care NHS Trust
- Herefordshire & Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Groups
- District Councils
- Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Substance misuse service
- Department for Work & Pensions
- Action for Children/ Barnardo's and Redditch Borough Council – jointly providing 0-19 Starting Well services
- Youth Services

9. The partnership has recently reviewed its focus in response to drivers including COVID-19 recovery. An action plan has been developed to deliver early help and prevention services responding to District level needs which will be the focus of meetings going forward. Experiences of children and families and their views will be a key part of developing effectiveness and collaboration.

10. The Early Help Strategy will be revised and signed off by December 2021. Work on the action plan will drive progress against the Strategy.

Family Hubs

11. The term 'family hub' has been adopted by Government to describe a way of joining up locally to improve access to services, the connections between families, professionals, services providers, and putting relationships at the heart of family help and in doing so takes an early help approach. Hub buildings are supported by virtual offers, with services for families with children of all ages.

12. How services are delivered varies from place to place, but these principles are key to the Family Hub model. In Worcestershire this includes:

- Children's Centres
- Starting Well Hubs
- Here2Help Offer
- Worcestershire Early Help Website

13. Partners are working together to map out these offers and relationships in Worcestershire district to district.

Mapping of Worcestershire's Early Help and Family Hub Provision

14. Provision of local services that provide early help information and support including family hubs are being mapped. Examples of these are shown in Appendices 2 to 8 demonstrating an overview of county provision and district maps for Bromsgrove, Kidderminster, Malvern, Redditch, Worcester, and Wychavon. These maps are not exhaustive of all community early help and will develop to become interactive and a tool for the public to identify services available locally.

15. In April 2021, the Worcestershire Early Help website was updated and streamlined to make information clearer and more accessible to families through the creation of a virtual family hub section. This pulls together lots of helpful resources and services for families to access. The focus of this is on the need of the child/young person and their family, advising the services available to meet that need. Feedback received from families has been very positive and the digital reporting on these pages shows the need for information to be available digitally for families and well as physically.

16. We will continue to collaborate across WCF, the County Council and with partners to develop the family hub offer further which gives children, young people, and their families the opportunities to access help and support from a whole range of different services in different ways. This could be online, via the telephone or face to face. The online Family Hub page is live, and details help and support that can be accessed directly by families ([The Family Hub | Worcestershire County Council](#)).

0-19 Starting Well

17. The Starting Well Services are delivered by Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust in partnership with Action for Children, Barnardo's, and Redditch Borough Council. The Services are provided for children and young people aged 0 to 19 years of age and their families across the 6 Districts in Worcestershire by teams of Health Visitors, School Nurses, Parenting Support Workers, Community Health Connectors and Peer Supporters.

18. The services provide universal health and development reviews at key points and additional packages of support where needed; infant feeding support; parenting support programmes and a range of peer support/groups. As well as home visiting, the services, support, advice and clinics are delivered from Family Hubs, community spaces, schools and GP surgeries.

19. More details of the service offer can be found on the Starting Well website www.startingwellworcs.nhs.uk and is detailed in the Starting Well Partnership report also presented to this meeting.

Children's Centres

20. The budget for Children's Centres sits within WCF and totals £0.25m per annum.

21. The Panel will note that updates have been provided previously to describe the use of children centre buildings for the provision of early childhood services. There has been continued collaboration from 2016 to optimise children's centres for the provision of services including further transfers agreed by Cabinet of centres on school sites to be school led provision for early childhood and family service including The Grove Primary School Malvern, Abbey Park First and Middle School and Bewdley Primary School. Appendices 2 to 8 show the location and use of children centre buildings.

22. As described earlier, the 0-19 Starting Well service is currently leasing 9 of these buildings for the delivery of community services. This arrangement has been a development of the Starting Well service to integrate and optimise service delivery points.

23. As was the part of the original intention of children's centres, early years education and childcare delivery remains a key element of use of these buildings. There are 21 children's centres used for early years provision and 2 children centres used for early childhood provision (linked to wider services), that meets the Council's duty to provide a sufficiency of childcare and early education places.

24. In addition, where appropriate we have taken opportunities to co-locate children's social work services with other provision at children's centres. This supports locality working and relationships between staff and organisations but importantly is an inclusive way of working with families.

25. One Children's Centre building is currently not operational for services: Bluebell Wood Children's Centre in Worcester. A recommendation had been made previously for the school (Perry Wood Primary and Nursery Academy School) to take on the lease of the building however, the school have not been able to confirm financial commitment to the running of the building. Currently discussions have resumed with the Acute Trust for delivery of a Maternity Hub from this site that would meet community need, be sustainable and offer opportunities for new parents to engage with other family services. Due process will be followed for any arrangements that may be required to bring services into place.

26. WCF and the County Council colleagues work together on a programme of monitoring and oversight that continues to work towards optimising these assets as part of the wider early help, early education and care and family hub offer.

Here2Help

27. Here2Help aimed to support all Worcestershire residents in need through the COVID-19 pandemic through the physical provision of food parcels and medication collections to shielding and isolating members of the public through the coordination of deployed staff and volunteers:

- Free school meals vouchers were allocated through schools and on average have supported 11,446 families throughout the school holidays.
- Act on Energy are a charitable company set up to help individuals and households to manage their household energy needs. This support can range from helping to pay fuel bills through to boiler servicing / replacements. From Feb – July 2021 there have been over 220 households supported. This number is expected to double as we enter the autumn and winter.
- Funding administered through Here2Help has focused on issuing emergency food parcels (c.116 parcels issued), covering additional staffing costs and free meal vouchers (190 Edenred food Vouchers and 55 supermarket food vouchers) for those households in need of food support.
- Grants have also been issued to foodbanks and volunteer centres to help manage stocks and supplies.

28. Due to the success of the Scheme, Here2Help is now being evolved to offer advice, support, and help on a wide range of services across Worcestershire – another part of Early Help for Worcestershire families. A full update from Here2Help has been provided in Appendix 9 with more information on Here2Help via dedicated website ([Here2Help Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) | Worcestershire County Council](#))

Integrated Well Being Offer (IWO)

29. Worcestershire's Integrated Wellbeing Offer (IWO) will empower people to live well, by addressing the factors that influence their health and wellbeing and building their capability to be independent, resilient and maintain good wellbeing for themselves and those around them. It will move beyond focusing on single issues and take a holistic and person-centred approach, addressing the psychosocial determinants of health behaviour. It will augment the collective response to early intervention and prevention to meet people's needs across the life course, improve health and wellbeing and address inequalities.

30. Work to develop and implement the IWO is led by a multi-agency steering group composed of partners from across the County Council, District Councils, NHS and Voluntary Sector. The group is co-chaired by the Director of Public Health and a voluntary sector representative. The steering group considers system wide developments and interdependencies and identifies opportunities to create a whole system approach.

Worcestershire Children First Early Help Family Support

31. Up until April 2021 Worcestershire Children's First had both a Targeted Family Support service (TFS) which worked with children 0-18 years across the county and who were identified as having level 3 needs and an Early Intervention Family Support service (EIFS) which was a mixture of WCF staff and commissioned services. The EIFS service had different routes of access and only worked with children aged from 5 – 13 years old and identified as having a level 2 need.

32. This approach to delivering family support to children and young people was not helpful for families and caused confusion for professionals. Therefore, when able to Worcestershire Children First reviewed this provision and restructured its internal early help family support service. The budget for the service remained as at before the restructure - £3.07m per annum

33. As of April 2021, the Targeted Family Support, and the Early intervention Family Support service both ceased and merged to become Worcestershire Children's First, Early Help Family Support service. This service now works with all children and families aged 0-18 years who need a Family Support worker to help them create changes and address needs at both level 3 and level 2 needs as per our Worcestershire levels of need guidance ([Early help guidance for professionals | Worcestershire County Council](#)).

34. The Early Help service was previously split across two service areas within Worcestershire Children First, but this merge has created one service and is part of Children's Social Care.

35. There are six district teams: Wyre Forest, Bromsgrove, Worcester, Malvern, Redditch, and Wychavon who all work with partner agencies in their local area to deliver an early help offer to children and young people. Children over the age of 13 years old can make a request and so can their parents and carers either by the online form or by calling their local team directly.

36. The Worcestershire County Council website page has been updated to provide families with information and the direct contact numbers for their local teams: ([Early Help Family Support District Teams | Early Help Family Support District Teams | Worcestershire County Council](#))

37. The Teams will complete both Early Help assessments and family plans or provide immediate virtual intervention directly to the family. The new Intervention model came into practice in September 2020 following learning from Covid whereby families needed an immediate response to the challenges they were facing and that the support they required at that moment in time was direct family support help and advice that did not require a multi-agency approach but could be safety and appropriately delivered remotely up to a 6-week period. It was recognised that families were at home and worried about Covid but were facing new challenges and their usual support systems were no longer available to them or sufficient, but this approach was a positive and timely response for them and their family.

38. In July 2021 OFSTED completed a focused visit under their ILACS inspection framework. The formal letter was published 23 August 2021 and commented.

“The local authority has made strong progress in improving the quality of practise for children and families in receipt of services at its family front door since the inspection in June 2019. Leaders have established a positive culture of commitment to continuous improvement across the service area. The early help partnership is now well engaged with the delivery of services, and most schools in Worcestershire have an early help offer, bespoke to the needs of their community”.

“Children and families assessed as not requiring a statutory social work response by the family front door are stepped down to early help services or signposted appropriately, ensuring a timely and proportionate response. Most children who need early help support receive a service that is multi-agency, reflective and responsive to Childrens needs. Children benefit from creative direct work and the voice of the child is considered in early help assessments”.

“Leaders have developed seamless referral and transitional arrangements to ensure that children and families experience minimal delay within the front door so that children gain the right service at the right time”.

COVID-19 Early Help Response delivered by Worcestershire Children First with Partners

39. During the Covid pandemic Worcestershire Children First have through their Early Help offer worked with partners on the Back 2 School project which was aimed at supporting families on managing anxieties around Covid and the return to school. Grant funding totalling £0.04m was spent on this project.

40. Similarly, the Safeguarding Babies initiative focused on parents who had a new-born child during the pandemic with WCF making contact with families ensuring that they knew what Early help support was in place for them and their babies.

41. Ready Steady Worcestershire was launched with various social media campaigns raising awareness of local support for children, young people, and their families. This evolved and developed into Worcestershire's awarded Holiday Activities and Food provision including term holiday activity programmes, food, period poverty, advice on energy bills, and money alongside the Here2Help offer (see below). The successes and information on current and future programmes can be found on the dedicated website ([Ready Steady Worcestershire - school holiday food and activities | Worcestershire County Council](#))

Early Help in Schools and Settings

42. As part of education duties to promote the welfare of children and keep them safe, schools have an important role in understanding early help needs, acting as a single agency with the family to understand and support and then seeking involvement from other relevant services and partners if needs cannot be met by the school alone. The education safeguarding network of schools with support from the education safeguarding team and early help partnership services of WCF (total budgets £0.27m per annum) have focussed in the last 2 years on each school understanding, developing, using, and promoting an early help offer for their school. Most state funded schools in Worcestershire have developed their understanding, use and promotion of an early help offer and display this for parents to access on the school website. This was recognised by Ofsted in the recent focused visit under the ILAC's framework.

43. The impact of a proactive early help approach in school helps to engage families early and problem solve together, can help families to help themselves, involves community services and can assist with improving absence, preventing exclusion, improve engagement with learning for both child, young person and their parents and impact on behaviour both at home and school.

44. The annual audit of schools safeguarding practices that is currently being completed by schools for 2021 and is administered and collated by WCF education safeguarding team asks detailed questions about needs and support at an early help level in schools. This annual audit provides helpful assessment for school leadership and management to assess effectiveness and development needs along with the providing valuable information at school level for the Worcestershire Safeguarding Partnership on early activity and inform training and development offer for schools through the education safeguarding network. One of the WCF education safeguarding business plan priorities for this year is to engage more early settings in developing their early help offer. This has already seen a positive uptake of engagement through an increase in settings joining the safeguarding network development sessions.

SEND and Early Help

45. Early Help information, support and services are also there to assist children and families who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), as part of the annual £3.5m budget for SEND services in WCF. This may be through school or early years setting or health support or accessing an activity or assistance. The Local Offer ([SEND Local Offer | Worcestershire County Council](#)) shows families and professionals what is available and how to access information, advice and guidance.

Youth Work and Positive Activities

46. Worcestershire County Council commissions a variety of “Positive Activities for Young People” which provides mainly open access youth provision and activities for young people across the county.

47. It is a universally accessible offer available to any young person aged 13-19 (or up to 24 for those with a learning difficulty). The offer for young people varies from place to place across the county and is provided by a number of organisations. In most Districts there is additional work directed at young people who might be at risk of being socially excluded as a result of their behaviour, educational needs, disability, or vulnerability, for instance.

48. District information on the County Council’s commissioned providers can be seen in the table below. These organisations and others deliver positive activities and youth work funded from other organisations including the PCC, District Councils, community safety partnerships and the National Lottery. All youth provision is currently being mapped and will be added to the Early Help maps.

District	Service
Bromsgrove	Woodrush Youth & Community Centre; YMCA Worcestershire
Malvern Hills	Malvern Cube; Upton Youth Forum; Positive Youth (Tenbury)
Redditch	Redditch Borough Council Consortium (including Redditch Skate & BMX Park, Arrow Vale Youth, Redditch Youth & Community Enterprise, What’s Your Point, YMCA Worcestershire, Your Ideas, Redditch Self-Defence, Up Foundation)
Worcester City	Worcester Community Trust
Wychavon	Droitwich Action for Future Youth (DAFFY); Ourside Youth Association (Evesham); Pershore Riverside Centre; You Turn Centre (Evesham); Wychavon District Council (Mobile Youth Bus)
Wyre Forest	Kidderminster District Youth Trust; Youth Direxions (Stourport)

GET SAFE

49. GET SAFE is Worcestershire's approach to identifying, preventing, and tackling criminal exploitation of children and young people. This is a multi-disciplinary partnership approach across the county and addresses all level of needs for children and young people, with an annual budget of £0.37m. This has an Early Help preventative approach, and the partnership provides not only website information, targeted campaigns, training, activities for young people but also preventative and early interventions services.

50. There is currently a plan to bring into practice within Worcestershire the "Steer Clear" work which is a multi-disciplinary preventative approach to tackling knife and weapon carrying with children and young people. There is also a new piece of work in development with young people aimed at preventative work and building support systems for young people aged 16 plus who vulnerable to criminal exploitation.

51. More information on GET SAFE can be found on the dedicated website: ([Get Safe - keeping children and young people safe from criminal exploitation | Worcestershire County Council](#)).

Purpose of the Meeting

52. The Panel is asked to:

- Consider the information in the report and comment on the update provided,
- Determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required and
- Agree whether it would wish to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 - Early Help in Worcestershire Booklet
Appendix 2 GIS Map Early Help Worcestershire*
Appendix 3 GIS Map Early Help Bromsgrove*
Appendix 4 GIS Map Early Help Kidderminster*
Appendix 5 GIS Map Early Help Malvern*
Appendix 6 GIS Map Early Help Redditch*
Appendix 7 GIS Map Early Help Worcester*
Appendix 8 GIS Map Early Help Wychavon*
Appendix 9 Here2Help Update September 2021

**please note that the scale maps in Appendices 2-8 may not identify all locations of provision and are being developed to include wider community provision. A red outline to a marker demonstrated on the maps indicates the children's centre or 'Ready Steady Worcestershire' (RSW) offer is located in the bottom 30% of areas using Worcestershire 2019 deprivation data.*

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director for Education and Early Help, Worcestershire Children First) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agendas and Minutes of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel:
7 February, 14 September 2018; 11 January, 10 May 2019; 14 February 17 July, 13 November 2020.

[Children and Families O&S Panel agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)